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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Monday, November 19, 1934.

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Subject: "Honey News." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics and the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, U.S.D.A.

--ooOoo--

My forgettery played a mean trick on me last week. Last week happened to be one of the special weeks of the year -- National Honey Week. Of course, I planned to celebrate by telling you some of the latest honey news; in fact, I had been saving up some interesting information from here and there just for the occasion. And then, as luck would have it, the time came and went without my realizing it.

Well, I'm trying to make amends today. It's high time we had a chat on this food which has such an illustrious past as well as an important present. Our taste for honey has come down from as far back as the first caveman who robbed the wild bees of their sweets. To the ancients it was a most important article of diet because it was almost their only source of concentrated sugar. In fact, until a few generations ago, when sugar came into worldwide use at lower cost, honey was the chief sweet food of the temperate zone. And today we have about a million beekeepers in these United States and about four and a half million colonies of bees. These colonies supply an average of from 160 to 215 million pounds of honey a year. But this year the total honey production of the country is considerably below average. The bees had their troubles with the drought this year. Most States have a smaller honey output than usual. But the bees in Ohio and Pennsylvania did their best to make up for the loss in other States and produced an unusually large honey crop.

The experts tell me that the cost of honey will go up considerably this winter, that the farmer will get more for the honey he sells, and that you and I will pay more for the honey we buy when we go to market.

So this seems a good time to mention a few facts about making the most of your honey.

First, about keeping honey. If you don't know the make-up of honey, you're likely to get fooled about the best place to store it. So many foods keep best in the refrigerator or cold box, that you may take it for granted that honey belongs there, too. As a matter of fact, honey keeps best in a dry, warm place, like the pantry shelf, say. Because honey contains sugar chiefly, it doesn't spoil readily. If tightly covered, you can keep it almost indefinitely at ordinary room temperature. Never store honey that is not sealed in the cellar or any other damp place, for it will absorb moisture and ferment, just as any other sugar sirup will. The experts don't recommend putting honey in the refrigerator. The cold may cause it to become cloudy and crystallize. Anyway, why waste good space in the refrigerator on a food that keeps so well outside?

By the way, don't make the mistake of supposing that honey is spoiling when it begins to form crystals at the bottom of the jar. All honey will change this way as it stands and ages. Alfalfa honey crystallizes most quickly; sage and tupelo honey least quickly. You can easily change the crystals back into liquid by heating the container in moderately hot water.

The kind of honey you buy and the form in which you buy it depend on your own taste and on how you are going to use it. Since honey takes its flavor from flowers, the kinds are as numerous as the flowers visited by the bees. You have a wide choice. Some people prefer the pale, clover honey with its delicate flavor; others like the darker color and rich taste of buckwheat honey; or any one of the many varieties of honey now on the market. Flavor is no test of quality. That's a matter of your own personal taste. Just remember that the pale colored honeys are mild and the darker honeys have a stronger taste.

As to form, you can now buy honey in about five different forms. You can buy extracted or liquid honey, strained from the comb. That's the most popular form, probably because it's the most convenient to use. Or you can buy a comb section in the wooden frame just as it comes from the hive. Then, you can buy cut pieces of the comb usually called "chunk honey" or "bulk comb" -- pieces of comb honey with liquid honey poured over them, packaged in glass jars or tin pails. You can buy "cut-comb" honey -- cut sections sold in cartons or wrapped in paper. Finally, you can buy crystallized or granulated honey.

If you value the natural flavor and color of any honey, you'll enjoy it most uncooked. Cooking changes honey somewhat. Uncooked honey you can use as a spread on your hot morning griddle cakes or waffles or biscuit or you can use it mixed with other foods for sandwich fillings; you can use it in sauce to pour over ice cream or puddings; you can use it to sweeten fruit or iced beverages, frozen desserts, or breakfast porridge.

Someone told me the other day about a very attractive winter fruit salad made with honey. Dip sections of orange or grapefruit in honey, roll them in chopped nuts or coconut and serve them on lettuce.

Another honey idea: You can give any kind of strained honey a thick, creamy consistency by beating it with a fork or egg beater. This "beaten" or "whipped" honey is particularly good for sandwich fillings. Try the school youngsters on sandwiches spread with a blend of honey, butter and chopped dried fruit or nuts. Honey combines well with either cream or cottage cheese, with peanut and almond butter, with grated orange peel. All these ideas might come in handy for the school lunch box.

Some day soon we'll have a chat on using honey in cooking.

Now for a Monday dinner menu: Casserole of round steak with tomatoes; Baked potatoes on the half shell; Buttered cauliflower; for dessert, Stewed dried apricots sweetened with honey; Crisp cookies.

